

AURORA



New Leader: Same Labour

Ever since the bail-out of the banks the injustice of capitalism has been impossible to deny. The victory of Jeremy Corbyn shows a groundswell of opposition to the massive attacks that European governments of all shades have implemented in the name of 'austerity'. Students forced to take out life-burdening loans; workers obliged to accept low paid precarious jobs; crumbling health services forced to farm out services to boost profits of private companies; cuts to unemployment and welfare benefits with claimants being tarnished as 'scroungers' while facing humiliation to avoid being 'sanctioned'... The list is endless.

Elsewhere in Europe, in Spain, Greece and Italy, the growth of populist parties has channelled working class anger and given false hope that the answer is a more democratic capitalism. In Britain though, the gradual, sector by sector attacks from a coalition government proclaiming that "we are all in this together" combined with a popular press targeting 'benefit scroungers' which sets worker against worker, have meant a more fractured resistance. Single issue campaign groups, isolated local battles, have sprung up in their hundreds and thousands.

It did not take long before that infinitely flexible, tried and tested weapon for diverting working class discontent onto safe ground for capitalism – the left wing of the 'Labour movement' – stepped in. When this happens genuine grass roots struggles are directed towards a sometimes hidden, sometimes clear left Labour agenda. The unions, particularly Unite and Unison have created paid full-time 'campaigner' posts in order to stretch their tentacles outside of the workplace and ensure they have a prime role in local protest actions.

At least one union, Unite, offers £5 to anyone who can recruit a new member for the union. These prominent public sector unions have also notoriously been

responsible for energy-sapping sectional 'days of action' and A to B marches which drained any confidence workers might have in their power to fight back as a unified class force. Instead, behind the scenes, these unions were working for a revival of an old-style, pre-Blair, pro-Keynesian Labour left. They were prepared to back whoever emerged as the Left candidate in the Labour leadership election.

A Saviour for Capitalist Democracy?

On the more strictly political level, a common thread running through the left is the need for greater democracy. They might talk about greedy bankers, but they are not talking about getting rid of parliament and overthrowing capitalism in favour of the direct democracy of workers' assemblies. This is all too utopian for them. They see the sclerosis of parliamentary democracy (12 million people did not vote in the general election) and imagine that with a more responsive, caring, return to something like (mythical) old Labour there can also be a return to something like the heady days of full employment, a cradle to grave NHS and welfare system ... as if after forty years of deepening crisis for world capitalism returning to the post-war boom was a policy option. Groupings like Counterfire and the People's Assemblies are heavily involved in the Labour Party left. Since they also overlap with the Stop the War Coalition, chaired until now by Jeremy Corbyn, this explains their backing for Corbyn as left Labour leadership candidate when Ed Miliband abruptly threw in the towel after Labour's election defeat.

Of course, this doesn't explain how Corbyn came to be the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition. Inside the Labour Party there have always been left-wing factions calling for programmes based on state ownership and intervention. During the '70s and early '80s they were prominent in Labour Councils like Lambeth, Islington, Greater

London and Liverpool, with leaders such as Ken Livingstone advocating "left-wing" policies. One of the high points was when Tony Benn came close to being elected as Deputy Leader in '81. Meanwhile the 'free market' economy appeared based on brutal restructuring and the decimation of the industrial working class.

Following Kinnock's clampdown on Trotskyist 'entryism' and the rise of 'Blairism' many of the advocates of state intervention became marginalised or chose to organise outside the Labour Party. This included the many political factions and organisations which emerged from the Trotskyist and Stalinist camp. These have always passed off state intervention in the economy via existing institutions with a left leadership, as a step towards socialism. A remnant of that left wing has continued in the Parliamentary Labour Party organised in and around the Campaign Group. Their presence has always been tolerated by the Labour Party establishment. In fact, they were a vital part of keeping together the Labour Party "broad church" – a way of making sure that generations of emerging activists can be corralled into the Labourist prison, an entirely safe situation for the capitalist system.

And so the New Labour establishment felt no threat by including Corbyn on the list of candidates. He was included at the last minute to give the illusion of choice. (The other three all stood somewhere in the "more of the same" mould, presenting varieties of "Austerity Lite" but all ready to balance the books.) As we say on our website – Corbyn was intended to be an Aunt Sally radical to disappear in the first round or two of voting with a slap on the back and wishes for "Better luck next time".

Unfortunately for the Labour MPs and functionaries they had no feel for the fact that those eligible to vote did not want more of the same. They failed to see that the unions had responded to the

Party's ending of the block union vote by encouraging their members to sign up for individual Party membership. Furthermore, when the Blairites copied the US primaries and made it easy for individuals to join and cheap to buy a vote (£3), they did not imagine that tens of thousands of people would do just that and vote for the token Left candidate. No doubt most of them want a return to the old Labour policies of state ownership, though many younger people have been attracted by Corbyn's pledge to end student loans and bring back the student maintenance grant.

If this were the end of the story it would be a bit of a joke seeing the Blairites sidelined with egg on their faces. But the truth is 'Corbynism' is a very real obstacle in the way of the working class developing a serious, unified resistance to all that capitalism throws at them. Grass root struggles are going to be even more turned into recruiting grounds for JC, the new messiah who can perform the miracle of using the capitalist state in the interest of the working class. This, as the worst crisis in the history of global capitalism makes life unliveable for more and more people on the planet. Many new militants are beginning to turn towards Communism. Instead of the need for the working class to overthrow the capitalist state Corbynism provides a dead end alternative. It pretends that state intervention and ownership is socialism. In fact that approach is part of what Communists call state capitalism. The fact that resistance to austerity needs to happen in a wider fight against capitalism is being lost in the sea of Corbyn social democratic confusion.

State Capitalism Is Not Socialism

Events in Greece show clearly what it means in reality to support a left wing government. As Syriza held their referendum we wrote: *Electing a Government while all the capitalist economic, political and state*

structures remain intact can offer no way forward. Syriza may have given lip service to fighting austerity but in reality it paved the way for the state to attack workers and make them pay for the crisis. The Corbynite Labour leadership is not in the same exposed position as Syriza, but already Corbyn has backed down on his left-wing symbolism around national Anthems, poppies and kissing parts of the monarch's anatomy to enter her Privy Council. His long time ally, John McDonnell has had to renounce any association with "unpatriotic" Irish Nationalism. He accepts the need to 'balance the books' even if not as rapidly as the Tories. How this squares with Corbynomics – the policy of printing more money for investment in infrastructure and/or 'people's quantitative easing' – he does not need to explain. As for students' hopes of a future without a debt load on their shoulders, Corbyn has already indicated he will not abolish student tuition fees. What chance the replacement of loans with maintenance grants?

Yet still the left-wing factions continue to be cheerleaders for the Labour leadership and all the evidence is that they'll keep on doing so. Whether as members of the Labour Party, as "independent" parties or a mixture of the two, they're taking the chance to strengthen themselves and recruit. They'll peddle the myth that a left wing government can use the state to solve the crisis. But this is a lie, and a very dangerous one. The truth is that state capitalism isn't socialism. Socialism is based on the working class forming its own mass organs of democracy outside of parliament and the state. Socialism can never be possible until the state is overthrown. Part of the Labour Party might be trying to become the acceptable face of capitalism, but this is a dead end and no way forward for workers today.

Capitalist Crisis Brings Human Tragedies

Over the past 2 years the media have saturated us with the sight and sound of human misery as refugees desperately seek asylum in Europe. Images of the bodies of small children washed up on shore have competed with pictures of sinking boats and squalid camps from Calais to Iraq.

The UNHCR estimates that in the last 5 years around 60 million people throughout the world have been displaced due to war. This is the biggest number since the Second World War ended. Of course if you read the Daily Mail or Daily Express etc these people aren't refugees fleeing war zones. They are just a "horde" of economic migrants aiming to steal our jobs, benefits and houses. The

facts are different. Over 85% of those trying to get North are from areas devastated by war. 54% of the total come from Syria and most of the rest from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. Syria alone has around 9 million "displaced persons" many within its own borders.

Why is all this happening now? The forced movement of people all over the world (and not just to Europe) is caused by the generalised failure of capitalism. Global economic crisis and imperialist rivalry which has stepped up in the wake of that crisis have created hell in many areas of the planet. The destruction of existing state structures by western imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq has opened up a Pandora's Box which is now

dovetailing into the debris of the Arab Spring of 2011. This was itself a consequence of the collapse of the financial system in 2008 which has had repercussions around the world.

Syrian Tragedy

Nowhere is this clearer than in Syria. The chaos in Iraq left by the UK and US invasion has been mirrored by the support of Russian and Iranian imperialism for the politically and economically bankrupt Assad dictatorship. In this situation of capitalist failure many like the Assad regime will take up arms to defend the power and access to wealth they currently have, whatever the consequences for the population. Mix in the actions of the

imperialist powers and you have ongoing misery for millions: indiscriminate and innocent victims of barrel bombings and drone strikes from all sides.

And the conflict is spreading. ISIS (like the Taliban and Al Qaeda before them) are the unintended consequences of imperialist manoeuvring. First the dismantling of the Iraqi Army gave them thousands of recruits amongst the Sunni excluded from the US puppet state. Then the Saudis and Qataris financed them as Sunni fundamentalists to oppose both Iran and Assad. Finally, Turkey got involved by colluding with IS exports of oil to finance its troops as well as allowing everything and everybody to cross the Turkish border to the IS zone. The aim

here was clear. IS were fighting the Kurds and this would prevent Ocalan's PKK from causing much mischief in Turkey. Now both Turkey and Russia have an alibi for bombing campaigns. They pretend they have joined the fight against ISIS but in fact this is a cover for their respective attacks on the Kurds and Assad's other opponents. All this means is that the armed conflict stretching from Syria into Iraq has now entered Turkey itself and a minor civil war between the PKK and the Erdogan Government already exists in Turkey's Kurdish territories of the South East. As there are already 2.3 million Syrians in Turkey the prospect of more (including Kurdish civilians) fleeing the area is more rather than less likely. Like the US and Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and even smaller

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The War Against the Working Class Intensifies

The new Trade Union Bill 2015-16 is a piece of blatant class war by the ruling class and their Tory representatives in Parliament. Not content with making the lives of millions more miserable by tax credit cuts, the Tory Government is now preparing further cuts and wage freezes in the public sector, and as part of this plan, it's launching a new anti-strike law.

The Real Aim of the Attack

Last July, thousands of workers in transport, education, the civil service and the health service went on strike on the same day against the erosion of their living and working conditions. The Institute of Directors immediately called for new laws to increase the threshold in strike ballots from a simple majority of those voting to an absolute majority of everyone eligible to vote and the turnout has to be at least 50%. It's a nice trick since

Sheffield Council Housing

The Labour Movement in Reality

In January we posted on our website (<http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-01-28/austerity-in-sheffield-labour-council-rips-into-council-housing>) about the Labour Council's plans to attack workers' pay and conditions and reduce services to tenants.

Since then the Trade Unions and Council have spent months in futile behind the door meetings preventing any unity between workers and tenants and keeping the workforce divided. In defiance of the Unions, many workers have adopted a "work to rule". Some are refusing to use their own vehicles during work time, others are refusing to carry out work outside their normal duties.

This action is a sign that workers will not simply be shackled by the Council, the Unions or the laws they use as their excuse. Win or lose, the workers' actions, denounced as "Wildcat" by the Unions shows hope for the future.

it turns every abstention into a no vote and that's the aim of the game. Using the same calculation not a single British Government since the Second World War would ever have got a majority. The current Tory government got the vote of less than 25% of the electorate in the last election but got over 50% of the seats in Parliament. Even with all the constant pressure on people to vote, there are still between 30% and 35% of people who do not vote in General Elections. It will be very difficult to get a sufficient turnout for a majority yes vote for a strike using only postal voting. This is exactly what the Bill's drafters intend.

And just to make it totally clear who the real target is, in the "important public services" a 40% threshold for a yes vote of those who vote (i.e. 80% of voters if the threshold is only just met) is needed. In fact most strikes are in the private sector, but due to the larger workforce in services like health and education 95% of all strike days lost are in the public sector. With public sector workers set to face more wage freezes and worsening working conditions the purpose of the bill is obvious – to stop any widespread class response.

On top of all this, any planned strike would have to give 14 days notice to employers (it's currently 7 days) and employers would be allowed to bring in scab labour (from agencies) as cover. They'll also be able to seek an injunction against any proposed strike action and even sue for damages. Solidarity action is already banned, but this law will reduce legal pickets to 6 with the union having to nominate a picket organiser who will have to wear an armband to indicate who s/he is, give her or his name to the police or "anyone who asks for it"(!) and carry a letter from the union to say that they are the accredited representative of the union. Police will also have to be informed of any loudspeakers or banners the strikers intend to use. Unions will even be obliged to reveal what they intend to say on social media. Failure to comply with any of these can result in massive fines. And it should not be forgotten that, unlike in many European countries, there is no real right to strike since strikers in the UK are not protected from the sack.

Some of this is already facing opposition – from worried bosses. David Davies, the right wing Tory MP, has compared the picketing clauses to the conditions of Franco's Spain whilst a *Financial Times* editorial asked why the Tories have "crossed the road to pick a fight". As they point out, there were only 12 strikes in manufacturing last year and only 788,000 working days were lost to strikes throughout 2014 (compared to the 13 million a year during the 1970s). The FT argues that the bill "could end up producing greater levels of disruption".

False Friends

Let's hope they're right. These enemies of our class are obvious, but we have plenty of false friends who claim to fight on our behalf. Workers can only defend themselves when they act and fight on their own account. This is disputed by many on the left who believe simple membership of a trades union is the key to winning any struggle. The truth is that unions today exist only to negotiate the terms of the sale of wage labour with the capitalists. They succeed at best only when the labour market is tight. In periods like now where de-industrialisation and casualisation of the workforce has weakened the social cohesion of the working class they are largely impotent. The Tories are confident in pushing through this anti-strike legislation partly because only a quarter of the workforce today is in unions but also because the class appetite for struggle is so low. But once the working class does revive and start to fight back it will find, as workers did in the past, that the unions are there to put a brake on the struggle – to stop it from taking on a wider political aim and confine it to a mere dispute over wages and conditions.

This is nothing new. At the end of the First World War, during a revolutionary wave sweeping the world, workers in Britain were also militantly struggling for a better existence. However they put their trust in the Triple Alliance of 3 big unions who had enough collective power to bring the Government to its knees. They sent a delegation to Lloyd George who told them that if they carried out their threat to strike they would win but it would "precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first order" and they would have to take

over running the country. His final question was "Are you ready?" One of those in the union delegation, Robert Smillie, told Nye Bevan that "From that moment on we were beaten". The then Tory leader, Bonar Law, summed it up:

"Trade Union organisation was the only thing between us and anarchy, and if the trade union organisation was against us the position would be hopeless".

A repeat performance in the 1926 General Strike made it clear that the unions were integrated into the capitalist state apparatus. "Industrial (good) relations" now replaced the struggle for a decent living as far as the unions were concerned.

The unions have acted ever since like an extra layer of management, creating massive bureaucracies and protecting the hefty salaries of their officials. Even under the law as it stands now, when workers do vote for a strike only 1 in 5 actually take place. The unions generally prefer to compromise rather than risk their funds and investments in fighting.

The Only Alternative

The Trade Union Bill is also about a fight between two sections of the British ruling class. The extra clauses the Tories have added to make it harder for unions to support an already cash-strapped Labour Party might make it seem as though Labour somehow represents the working class. But Labour Governments have also tried to use the law to curb strikes (way back in '74 Barbara Castle did just that and in 1911 Arthur Henderson and 4 other Labour MPs tried to get a law passed where strikes would have to give a month's notice before they could go ahead). The 'Labour movement' has a long history of trying to control the class struggle. Labour has used troops against strikers many more times than the Tories. Even the argument that being in a union can give workers confidence to fight back without fear of individual victimisation is nonsense since this is at the expense of union members hardly knowing what the union is doing in their name. What's more, unions don't unite the working class – they divide it section by sec-

tion. The unions don't need government legislation before they oppose solidarity action. They have been doing this for years. Even last July's strike day was turned into a protest ritual rather than evidence of a real fightback. And the working class divided is exactly how capitalism wants us.

The TUC's only response to the latest anti-strike bill is to call for a lobby on the day before it is due to go to Parliament (November 2). They have issued special instructions on how to lobby. At most this will get some minor concessions which the TUC will parade as a kind of success but it does not change much for the unions themselves. What the law doesn't cover is action outside of and against the union. Workers taking wildcat action (as the *Financial Times* fears) and going beyond union boundaries, giving solidarity on picket lines, organising mass assemblies of workers to elect recallable delegates to strike committees in order to organise real resistance have a lot better chance of fighting austerity than the current charade. At present there is not much confidence amongst workers to take these steps and many will point to the divisions in our ranks (like those between precarious, temporary and full time for starters) but austerity is not going to go away. At some point a new "poll tax" moment which hits at enough of us at the same time will arrive (the arrogance of the ruling class knows no bounds) and then we will be able to take on board the lessons of past struggles as the telecom workers in Spain did earlier this year (see our website). We have nothing to lose but the debts which chain us to capitalism. **Another world is possible.**

What We Stand For

We stand for a global society in which production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. It is a society which can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. Only such a society can rid us of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: We call it communism but it has nothing in common with the Stalinist state capitalism of the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a 'party' for want of a better word. This organisation is not a government in waiting. It does not rule but it does lead and guide the struggle for a new world. The CWO by no means claims to be that party but only one of the elements which will come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power. We are not in competition with other genuinely working class organisations but seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

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Capitalist Crisis Brings Human Tragedies cont

imperialist players want to stick their fingers in the pie in the struggle for power and control in the Middle East.

Eritrean Example

Beyond the Middle East armed conflicts continue in Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, the Congo and so on and all threaten to spread to neighbouring states. Imperialist wars are only part of the tragedy. Capital – via governments and corporations – is playing out the economic version of this tale. Just as an example, let us take the story of Eritrea – a major contributor of "displaced people", adding hundreds of thousands over recent years. The media have little to say about the place. Nevsun, a Canadian corporation is involved in massive mining operations in the country, mainly for copper. Afewerki, the country's President has a major stake in the mine (40%). He ensures that it is supplied with slave labour via national service which can last until the age of 50. The human rights abuses are commonly known – excessive hours, virtually no pay, no health and safety considerations, many people

killed or seriously injured at work. Eritrea demonstrates that in an imperialist world national liberation is a myth. The Afewerki regime, like so many ex-colonial regimes, is simply the enforcer for globalised capitalism which does nothing for the basic economy where life for most people is centred on subsistence agriculture. This is generally being destroyed by the forced labour of national service. The mines serviced by this labour are controlled by the regime and international capital. Many migrants from other African countries have similar tales to tell. International capital is gradually destroying country after country, region after region within the disadvantaged areas of the world, mainly for the sake of mining and agri-business. It is the dispossessed of those countries who pay the cost but even here it is only a minority who can afford to risk the perils of the journey to Europe.

European Response

Or rather non-response. European states have failed to agree on a policy to deal with a problem which has been staring them in the face for years. Only now when 2 million refugees are expected to arrive in Europe have minds begun to focus.

But they are not of one mind because each of the member states of the EU is dominated by its own national interests.

On the surface Merkel's Germany is the most generous by accepting nearly half of all arrivals. In reality there is an element of calculation here. The refugees are not illiterate or unskilled. Many were well off and in professions in their country of origins. Those who manage to 'take ship' for Europe are lucky in many respects, having been able to raise the often \$4-6000 demanded by people traffickers. Most had hoped that the local war would end and they could rebuild their lives. But after 4 years it was clear that war was spreading not ending. They stuck out the misery of the various camps in and around Syria but the Turks, for example, will not allow them to work and will not allow their children to go to school. These were the sort of refugees that appealed to Merkel's government because they would increase the skills of the labour force at a time when the labour market was getting tight and they might have to pay more to the existing workforce. Of course this calculation is not understood by all, particularly those who are disposed to racism (primarily in the East). But racism will increase if more cities

do like Hamburg which terminated the social housing contracts of their tenants to take on these presumably wealthier refugees. There is nothing like a bit of divide and rule for ensuring that workers fight each other rather than the bosses. The same schizophrenia can be seen in the UK with Teresa May talking tough about expelling migrants whilst the top bosses' organisations assert they are vital for the economy. Whilst many states are looking to continue to deal aggressively with the issue – using police, armed forces, fencing, altering visa and asylum regulations and so on – the emerging consensus is that Europe should give financial and material aid to the camps in areas close to Syria etc. In the latest move they are trying to bribe Turkey into allowing Syrians a better life in Turkey. Given the problems in Turkey highlighted above there is not much chance of success here. In fact there is no capitalist solution since it is the very nature of the system which is creating the distress in the first place. Global inequality and wars stoked by imperialism in the pursuit of profit are all the current system has on offer. **Only a world communist system can end this increasing misery.**